Chapter 7

Re–Territorialising Governance and the State: Exploring Advancements in Property Taxation Systems Databases in Karnataka, India

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ABSTRACT

Attracted by the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), political actors across the world have adopted computer-based systems for use in government as a means of reforming inefficiencies in public administration. This book chapter critically examines the convergent use of the new digital technologies and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) within the reform of government administration, through the in-depth examination of a central case study focused around a collaboration between the government of the Indian state of Karnataka and the non-profit eGovernments Foundation, from 2002 to 2006; a partnership which sought to reform existing methods of property taxation via the establishment of an online platform-system across the municipalities of 56 towns and cities within the state. The research analyses prevailing actor behaviour and interactions, their impact on the interplay of local contingencies and external influences shaping project implementation, and the disjunctions in these relationships which inhibit the effective exploitation of ICTs within the given context.

INTRODUCTION

This book chapter critically examines the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in governmental reform processes for political, economic, and social development. Over the course of the last two decades, globalisation and a burgeoning growth in Information Technology have been rapidly dismantling traditional barriers to trade, travel, and communication; and ICTs are seen, today, to possess the potential to change government institutions and their fundamental mechanisms of service.

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delivery, together with the capacity to bring about transformations within existing relationships between
governments and citizens. When considered historically, developments in communication technologies
have resulted in changes to the manner in which governments function, altering existing administrative
processes and challenging public agencies to find new ways in which to communicate and interact with
their citizens. This observation has held particularly true for the new, digital information and communica-
tion technologies; whose rapid, global proliferation has enabled the electronic production, transmission,
processing, communication, and consumption of increasingly vast quantities of information.

In consequence, although the idea of a communications network spanning the globe is not new, de-
velopment actors across the world, attracted by the ‘hype and hope’ of Information and Communication
Technologies (ICTs), have, more recently, adopted computer-based systems and related digital platforms
for strategic use in government as a means reforming the inefficiencies inherent within public service
 provision. Much has been written about e-governance from within a growing stream of scholarly and
practitioner literature on ICT-for-development, generating countervailing perspectives wherein optimistic,
technocratic approaches are countered by far more sceptical standpoints on technological innovation.
Although a number of these electronic government or ‘e-government’ projects have achieved significant
results; evidence within the literature and from the field indicates that despite the reported success stories,
the rate of project failure remains particularly high.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This book chapter critically examines the role that the convergent use of Information and Communi-
cation Technologies (ICTs) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) plays in the reform of government
administration through the in-depth examination of a central, case study-focused enquiry concentrating
on a collaboration formed between the government of the Indian state of Karnataka and the non-profit,
private sector-based eGovernments Foundation from 2002 to 2006; a partnership which sought to reform
existing methods of property tax collection via the establishment of an online collection and payments
system across the municipalities of 56 towns and cities within the state territory.

In recognising the need to turn property tax into a viable revenue instrument that delivers high tax
yields without compromising on citizen acceptance, the eGovernments Foundation, on contract with
the Directorate of Municipal Administration (State Government of Karnataka), developed and rolled-
out an innovative, open-source- based software platform; aimed at digitising property tax records, and
at cartographically mapping the impact of tax-related administrative processes, to track compliance
and to check and curtail tax evasion. The research advanced herein, therefore, engages with the politi-
cal circumstances and psychological contexts circumscribing the strategic development, adoption, and
use of ICTs within the process of government; through the in-depth examination of a central research
case study concerned with the use, and the impact, of the Internet and Internet-related technologies on
municipal government operations within a developing world context.

In particular, the research analyses actor behaviour, motivations, and interactions surrounding the
conception and maintenance of e-government software platforms; thereby facilitating societal and
democratic transformations. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of the ‘Ecology of Games’ and
the ‘Design-Actuality Gaps’ model, both of which recognise the importance of a multitude of diverse
motives and individualistic behaviour as key factors influencing organisational reform and institu-
tional change, this research chapter contributes not just to an understanding of the role of ICTs in Indian public
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